



HARD LABOR
AND
OTHER POEMS
BY
JOHN CARTER



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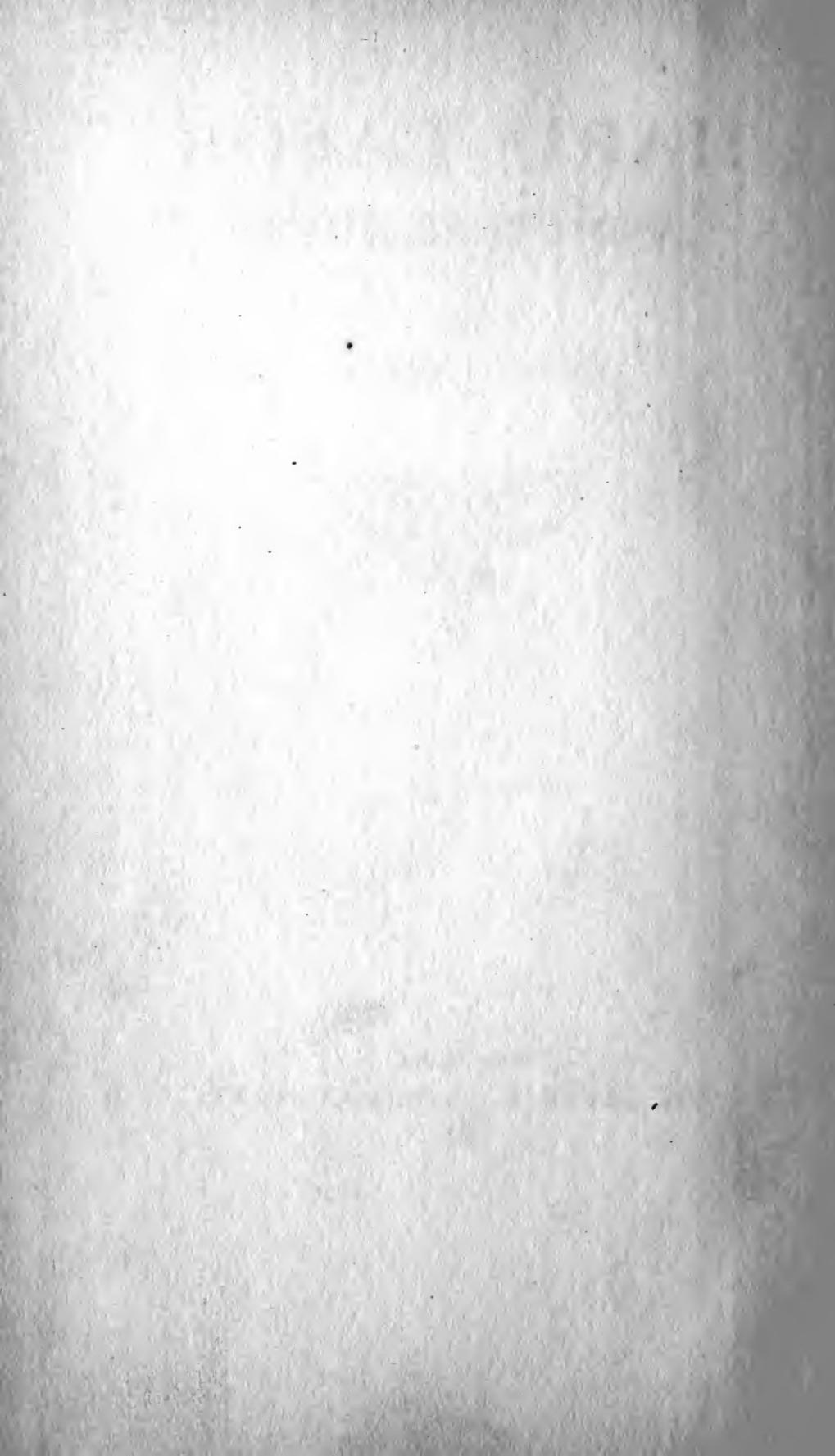
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HARD LABOR AND OTHER POEMS



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BY

JOHN CARTER



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TO
ONE THAT TURNED NOT

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HARD LABOR

HARD LABOR

I

I WORK, and as the task is done I brood
On what has been and what is yet to
pass,
A life spilt from an idly-handled glass,
And days as this, an endless multitude.

Labor and brooding — is there then no
rest?

Day follows day, and in the silent
nights

Throng ghostly memories of past de-
lights,

Faces I loved, and lips that I have pressed,

HARD LABOR

Until the sullen, deep-toned morning bell
Wakes me to face a yesterday again
With all its bitter agony of pain.
Thou didst not linger, Dante, in thy hell.

They say the torture's gone, the dawn's
arisen,
Mercy, to angered hearts a suitor
strange,
Has begged her own; yet this they
cannot change,
I have been free, and I am here in prison.

HARD LABOR

II

WE bear upon us different brands of
shame,

And some the outward insults cannot
brook,

The gaoler's ready oath, the scornful
look,

While others grieve in silence; yet the
same

Rebellious thoughts we share; we hate
alike

The grudging hand that offers us its
dole,

And in the deep recesses of the soul

The eager voice, half-stifled, whispers
“strike!”

A brave pretence we make of merriment,
Cut-throats and thieves, a jolly mur-
derous crew;

HARD LABOR

“The Devil’s Own Brigade” — he
spake most true,
And here and there, who knows? one
innocent.

Nay, we are innocent all, we never stole,
A madman has condemned us; it may
be
We shall go hence to-morrow, par-
doned, free.
Free in the body, yes. But in the soul?

HARD LABOR

III

O THOU belovèd of the cloud-dark hair,
Whose hands I clasp no more, whose
lips I crave,
O thou who art so beautiful and brave,
Avert thine eyes; look not on my despair.

I have not breathed thy name since first
this gate
Shut, and the wall upreared its frown-
ing height,
Unless some stealthy turnkey in the
night
Has heard a whisper, sobbing-passionate.

Four gaunt years have I mouldered in
this place,
Am I not then repentant of my sin?
I know not, for my heart is dead
within,
Thou art so far — I cannot see thy face.

HARD LABOR

And yet, if thou hadst died, I had returned

To holy thoughts and long-forgotten
prayers.

So might thy God be cozened unawares
To yield a moment of His heaven un-
earned.

HARD LABOR

IV

LABOR and brooding, and a shattered
Grail,

And at the last a few square feet of
earth,

What care I for your jargon of new
birth?

To live and strive again, again to fail?

The deadly sin atoned, the shame forgot,
To rise triumphant to a Love-God's
breast

I crave not. Mine the certainty of
rest.

Ruthless I lived; unpitied let me rot.



CON SORDINI

THERE is but silence; yet in thought I
heard
The desperate chords of that wild
polonaise,
The sixth of Chopin's wizardry, but
blurred,
As o'er a battle-field a mournful haze
Blots out the dying from the dead
men's gaze.
Why, all the pageantry of war was there,
Cannon and standard, ruined hearth
ablaze,
The muffled roll of death-drum, trumpet-
blare,
And lonely women, mute in measureless
despair.

HARD LABOR

Nay, this is Cornwall; hear ye not Isold'
Cry to her lover in the starlit night?
Swiftly, thou puppet-hero, seize and hold,
Until with blood-red fire the heaven's
alight.

Ah! on the morrow, Tristan, thou shalt
fight;

Thou art foredoomed to loneliness and
pain.

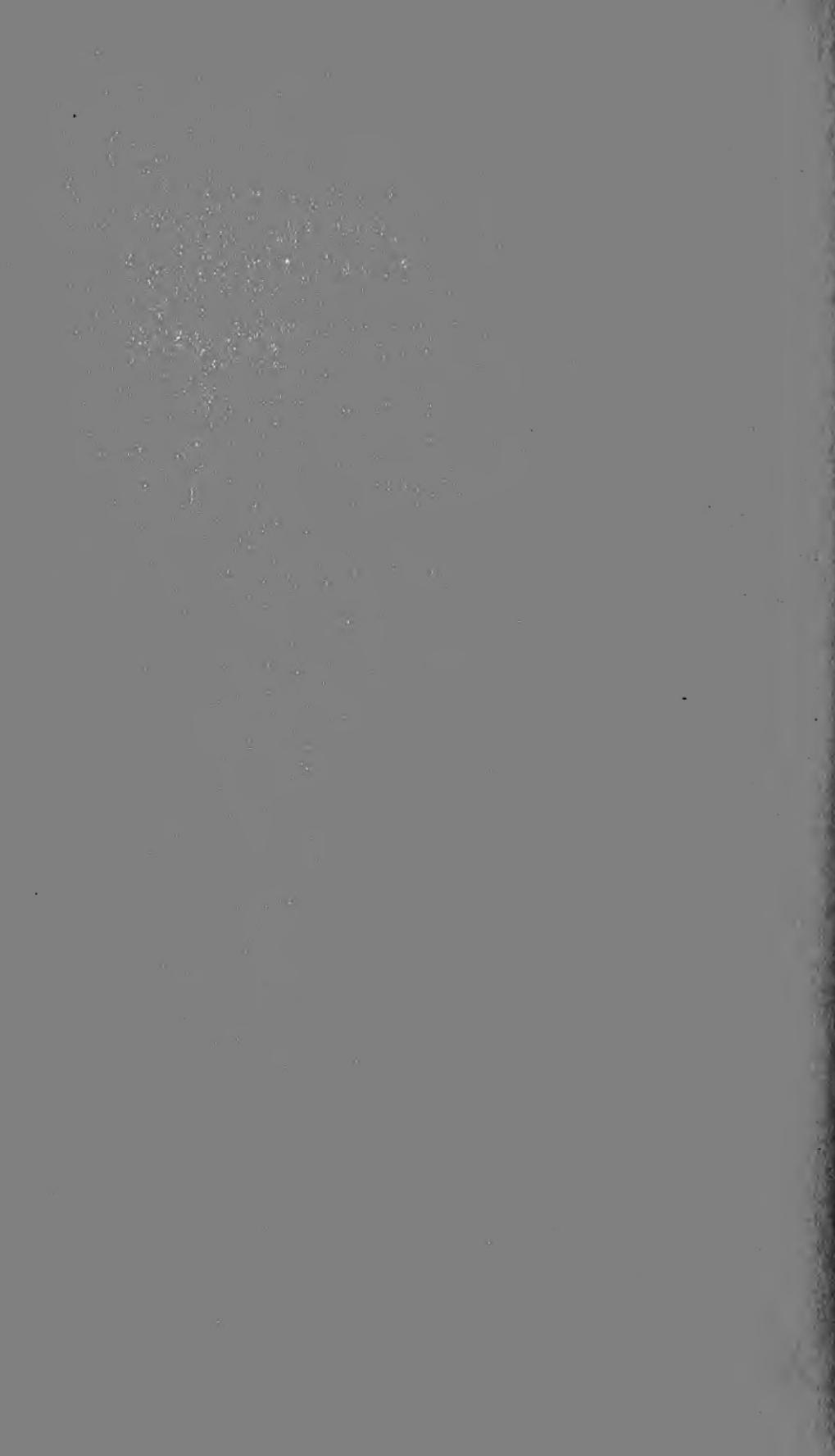
Thy valiant arm, invincible for right,
Upraised in evil, conquers not again.
Soon in thine ear she pours full-throated
song in vain.

The violins are hushed; a somber chord
Startles the dim cathedral; tremblingly
Pure boyish voices supplicate their Lord,
Chanting a dirge-like minor melody.
“In Babylon we wept, remembering
thee,
O Zion” . . . but they know not what
they sing.

CON SORDINI

“Out of the depths, O Lord” . . . but
they are free,
And through their veins the hot blood,
rioting,
Attunes their care-free hearts to madri-
gals of spring.

Ye that have tamed the wilderness of
sound,
Of your proud minstrelsy my share I
claim.
I have not, in the darkness here fast-
bound,
Denied the brilliance of your sacred
flame.
There is no power in agony or shame
To bar me from the fire-crowned heights
ye hold.
In deepest silence, I may hear the same
Unearthly music that I loved of old.
I crave no dole, who draw from stores of
wealth untold.



BALLADE OF MISERY AND IRON

HAGGARD faces and trembling knees,
Eyes that shine with a weakling's hate,
Lips that mutter their blasphemies,
Murderous hearts that darkly wait:
These are they who were men of late,
Fit to hold a plough or a sword.

If a prayer this wall may penetrate,
Have pity on these my comrades, Lord!

Poets sing of life at the lees
In tender verses and delicate;
Of tears and manifold agonies —
Little they know of what they prate.
Out of this silence, passionate
Sounds a deeper, a wilder chord.

If a song be heard through the narrow
grate,
Have pity on these my comrades, Lord!

HARD LABOR

Hark, that wail of the distant breeze,
Piercing ever the close-barred gate,
Fraught with torturing memories
Of eyes that kindle and lips that mate.
Ah, by the loved ones desolate
Whose anguish never can pen record,
If Thou be truly compassionate,
Have pity on these my comrades, Lord!

L'ENVOI

These are pawns that the hand of Fate
Careless sweeps from the checker-
board.
Thou that know'st if the game be straight,
Have pity on these my comrades,
Lord!

BALLADE OF TWILIGHT AND SILENCE

RUMBLE and whir of dray and car,
Thousand feet on the great highway,
Torturing chords that throb and jar,
A restless melody, wildly gay.
Under the lilt o' the tune they play,
The silent grief of the city lies,
And menacing-swift, at close of day,
The shadows fall and the music dies.

Deep in the virgin woods afar,
A thrush pours forth his soul to the
May,
And never a hurried note shall mar
The ecstasy of the magic lay.
In drowsy measure the branches sway
Till the sun burns low in the cloudless
skies,

HARD LABOR

And peacefully upon leaf and spray
The shadows fall, and the music dies.

Out of the dark where no songs are,
I that have sinned and gone astray,
Moth-like, lift mine eyes to a star,
Voicelessly to a far God pray.
See, from His heav'n in bright array
A messenger to the dim cell flies!
The echoes wake to his singing — nay,
The shadows fall and the music dies.

L'ENVOI

O belovèd, I know as they,
This is the one thing right and wise.
Weep no longer, now and for aye
The shadows fall and the music dies.

LUX E TENEBRIS

At the day's end your lamp is lit,
And I that wander am glad of it.
I may not sip of the glowing fire
That burns in your eyes, O Heart's
Desire.

But out of the lantern's steadfast gleam
In utmost dark I weave me a dream.

The line forms sullenly; there is no
sound,
Save a sharp voice that rasps its "For-
ward march!"
The shuffling feet creep onward through
the arch;
Locks clatter; and in weariness profound
Most sink unconscious to a dreamless
sleep,

HARD LABOR

While some few through the night long
vigil keep.

With the sunrise your voice lifts clear,
And I that wander afar may hear.
Vainly harps the wind in the trees
That ever the song accompanies.
But out of the harmony incomplete
I weave an anthem of praise, my sweet.

Ah, we that knew the better from the
worse
Our deeper guilt must pay a thousand-
fold.
In mourning garb come those we loved
of old
And some weep silently; but others curse.
“Ye filled the cup; why should ye not
then drink?”
The words are just; our whipped souls
can but shrink.

LUX E TENEBRIS

But the lamp's alight, and the clear,
proud song

Shall reach to the throne of God ere long.

The night must pass, and a strange, new
dawn

Burst upon field and copse and lawn;
For out of the warp of shame and tears
I weave the joy of the coming years.

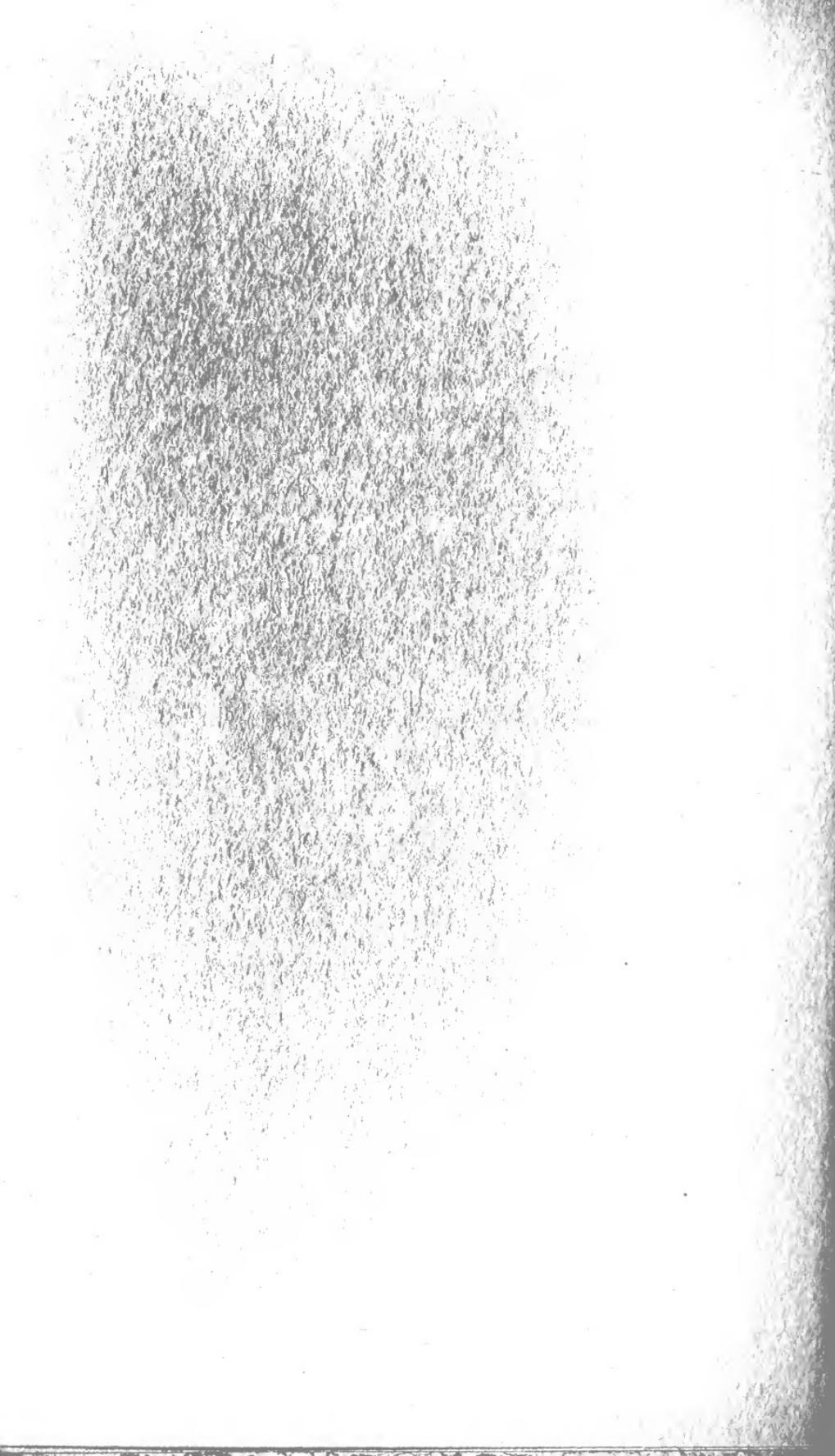


PRISON SONG

THOU that hast cherished me,
Thou of my starveling life the nobler
part,
From the shamed sorrow of thy Calvary
Look up, dear heart!

Dark is the silent night.
Yet do I hear the restless winds afar;
Lo in the east the somber heaven's alight,
Shines forth a star.

Eagerly I crave life,
Scorning the thousand shadows that
assail.
Thou hast so armed me for the utmost
strife,
I dare not fail.



PRISON SONNET

I DREAMED the woman who is all my care
Had stretched her arms to me; a
weakling's tear

Dropped to my cheek unbidden; near,
so near

She seemed, I strove to touch in my de-
spair

The empress' coronal of night-hued hair.
But anguish graven on her face I read,
And in a sudden agony of dread

I forced my lips to unaccustomed prayer:

“If Thou art God, despite my unbelief,
Guard her who hath not sinned against
Thy word,
Who hath not mocked Thee in her deep-
est grief;

HARD LABOR

So shall my mouth revile no more, O
Lord!"

Sleep veiled from me the splendor of her
eyes.

Who knows if it be thus that He replies?

INTROIT

THE very blind
A noble heritage of song may seize,
A broad domain, wherein the uncon-
quered mind
May rest at ease.

And we who dwell
Within the shadow that the glad world
casts,
Against our tyranny of shame rebel
While music lasts.

Life hath no chain
Beyond the power of joyous song to
break.
Hark! in the mystery of the pure strain
God is awake.



OUT OF THE DEPTHS

BEATEN, blinded and maimed,
Stabbed with a twist of the knife,
Broken, branded and shamed —
Some of us call it life.

Maybe you call it life,
Torn from all you held dear,
Out in the light your wife,
And you in the dark, you here.

Ruled by a wave of the hand,
Watched and bolted and barred;
Maybe it's God's command,
Some of us call it hard.



A VISION OF RELEASE

WHAT rarest hues enrich the dingy street!

What unimagined harmonies arise!

And every beggar-maiden that I meet

Is fit to grace a throne in Paradise.

Ah, such a greeting laughs from lips
and eyes,

It seems the sternest anchorite would
hear

The swelling note of joy that underlies
This chord of fellowship; clear and more
clear

The quivering strings resound in hearts
that know not fear.

Yet is the city wearisome; I pass

Beyond its gates to where the sunlight
falls

In noon-day brilliancy on the cool grass,

HARD LABOR

And from his hidden nest a bluebird
calls.

Comrades of yesterday, within your
walls

Ye faint beneath your load of misery.

Here am I spouse of Nature, in whose
halls

I rule a revel, turbulently free.

The pensive river smiles; the hills laugh
back at me.

Hour upon hour I drink my fill of this,

Deep-sunk in ecstasy; till twilight
creeps

Over the landscape; and the night-winds
kiss

The trembling poplar; and the shy
moon peeps

From the dark chamber where her
master sleeps.

Poor, starvèd folk that have escaped the
chain,

A VISION OF RELEASE

Ye know not how the enfranchised
spirit leaps

To greet the wanderer, fair Night,
again

Whose loveliness outlasts infinities of pain.

Night, and the surge and sweep of new
desire

That blots to nothingness the written
line.

At last my eager footsteps may aspire
To where sirocco mates with Apennine.

Proud Rome and dark Byzantium are
mine

And she who queens it o'er the
Cyclades.

Mohammed calls me to his ancient
shrine,

Egypt unveils her deepest mysteries,
Of rose and nightingale murmurs a Per-
sian breeze.

.

HARD LABOR

The wind-song fails; closed are the
temple-gates;
The revelry is hushed, the vision spent.
Reluctantly the ling'ring mind awaits
New dawn and old, unchanging dis-
content.
“Are they indeed so spotless-innocent
Who draw away from me their gar-
ments’ hem?
If I be slave of slaves, what punish-
ment
Shall an almighty God reserve for
them?”
So in my waking thought I judge, and I
condemn.

SHELLEY

We talked of Shelley far into the night
Till the proud stars, his playmates,
jealously
Looked down upon your eyes that, dazzling-bright,
Would rob their lover of his loyalty.
I pray, if the Most High may grant
one plea,
A fragment of that ecstasy to keep.
The actual, breathing moments may
not be,
Yet a rewarding harvest may I reap;
There is no drought can parch the
shadow-field of sleep.

We cherished most the tender, bird-like
songs;

HARD LABOR

Not ours to measure doomed Prometheus' woe,
Nor that sad maniac's, who bore his wrongs
To listening Julian and Maddalo.
Spring wakened love in us; we could not know
The sordid question the long winter brought,
Whether to make of misery a show,
Of shame a merchandise, or as we ought
To bear grief silently, the master-work unwrought.

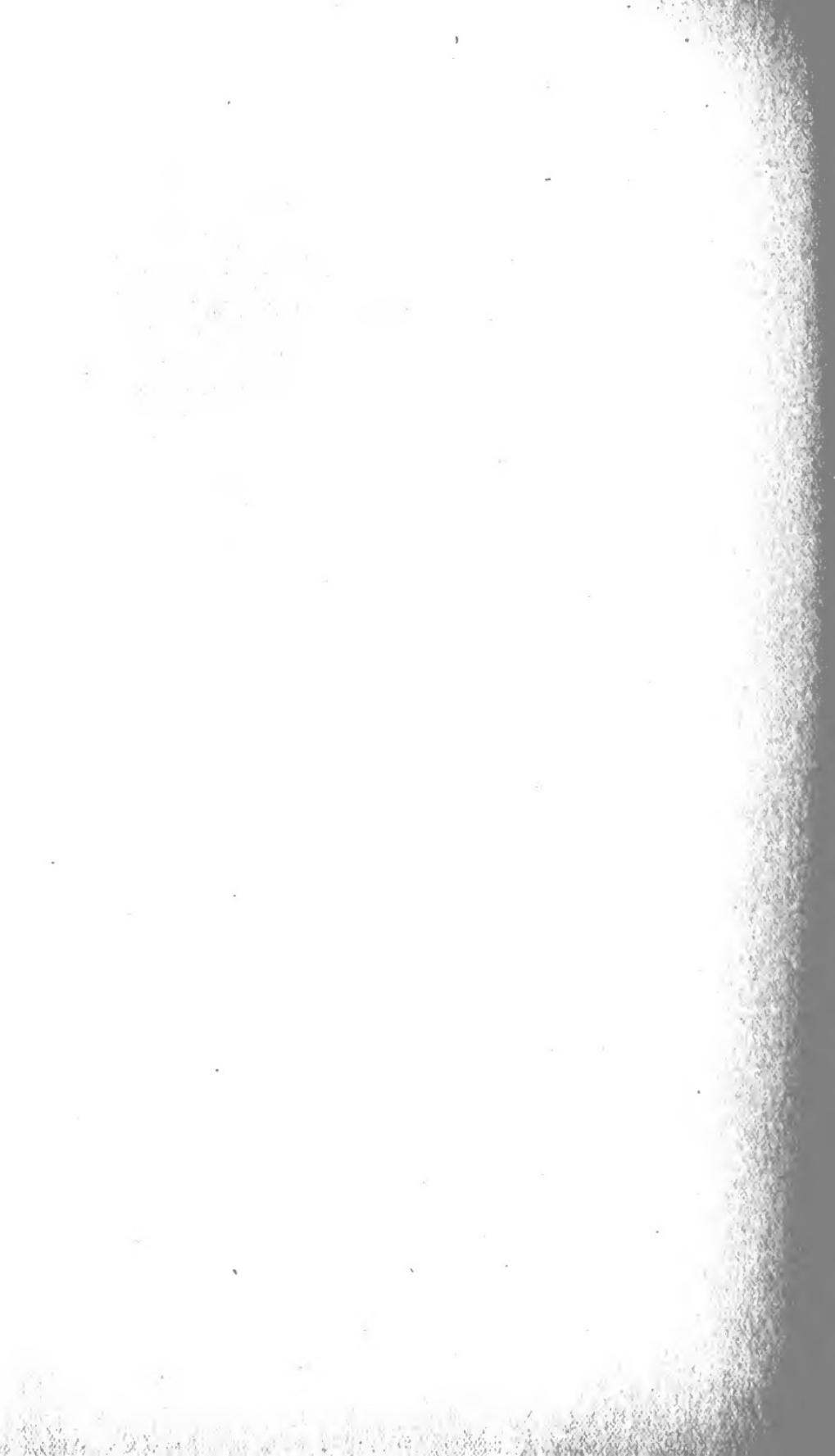
As Shelley wrote in heart's blood, even so
Unnumbered threnodies my pen indites,
Of faithful love dishonored long ago,
And dark remorse that fills the age-long nights.
This, at the least, a world of pain requites;

SHELLEY

Though on my pilgrimage no sun may
shine,

I follow not the lure of wand'ring lights,
But till, Samaritan, your hand clasps
mine,

I stagger feebly on to the far-distant
shrine.



A SEPTIME OF DESPAIR

How weary are the hours!
The long, long years how slow!
Time, palsied, scarce devours
 The minutes as they go.
My cringing spirit cowers
 Before unworshipped powers.
Lord! Must these things be so?

How weary are the hours!
The long, long years how slow!
I mock your tales of towers,
 Of heroes long ago.
Spring scatters down her showers,
 I reck not of her flowers.
Lord! Must these things be so?

How weary are the hours!
The long, long years how slow!

HARD LABOR

For, though the dark sky lowers
Above our shame, we know
That there be magic bowers
That jessamine endowers.
Lord! Must these things be so?

How weary are the hours!
The long, long years how slow!

A ROSE IN THE WILDERNESS

THEY have spilt the wine, they have
shattered the cup,
They have prisoned me.

The songs that I sang are scarce stored up
In memory.

But hither, where naught but henbane
grows,

God has sent me a wild, red rose
And my heart is free.

Your love came light as a breeze in May,
As a raindrop's patter,
A chance word dropped in an artless way
In random chatter.

But the love that came so light, my dear,
Has made of this grim old prison here
A little matter.

HARD LABOR

Parley not with haggard Despair
In the lonely nights;
Let him not shroud the distant flare
Of the beacon-lights.
A few scant years of shamed defeat,
Then with your arms about me, sweet,
Then — to the heights!

PRISON SERENADE

THIS is the outer darkness,
Hither shines never a ray.
Souls are deadened and damned,
Lips have forgotten to pray.
Out of the silent shadows
Comes the sound of a lute,
And, is it sobbing or singing?
Close the mouth of the brute.

“Eyes, blue eyes, and hair of gold,
Are they yet as they were of old?
And lips so red?
Softly tread
Over the ashes; love is dead.”

This is the realm of silence,
Speech is not, but cries,

HARD LABOR

Strange and dark and terrible,
Out of the stillness rise.
Cries, and hark! that whisper,
Is it speech or a blur?
“Have not pity on me, O Lord,
Lord! Have pity on her!”

“Quit ye like men,” they tell us,
“Whine, nor quarrel, nor faint;
So, our brothers in heaven,
Ye shall be free of taint.”
And in the silent shadows
Quivers the lute’s soft chord,
And ever mumbles the crime-scarred,
“Pity not me, O Lord!”

TO LOVE UNCHANGING

THEY do no evil to imprison me.

Else might I not this faithfulness revere
Of love that keeps no count of day nor
year,

Else might I not drink deep this ecstasy.

The lifting of the cloud when I am free
May light a life new-born, but in her
eyes

Who blessed the beauty of the darkened
skies

No more beloved, nor worthier can I be.

What wonder that I proudly hold my
head,

Or that I bear with ease my little frets?
Such memories as these are not regrets,

HARD LABOR

They are the ladder's rungs that I must
tread.

In one pure realm, fair as the maiden
spring,

No malefactor am I, but a King.

AS I LEAP FORTH

As I leap forth
Into a strange, kind world, a moment halt
My footsteps; and the chance which
makes my worth
I weigh with that mischance they call my
fault.

This joy that springs
From the dank swamp of hideous misery
I am not worthy; but the gay thrush
sings
Triumphant, and the sun smiles down on
me.

Unreal it seems,
Half ecstasy, half weariness and pain;
For so I fear this haven of my dreams
Shall vanish, and the storm come back
again.

HARD LABOR

Past, it is past.
Before the sweep of dawn the shadows
flee.
I, from the heart of life long since out-
cast,
Return, in body as in spirit, free.

IN THE GREATER PRISON



THE TRAMP'S TALE

It's a desolate world to-night,
Cold and leafless and murky white.
The drunken moon adrift in the sky
Hides and emerges fitfully.
The wind to a whining prayer is bent,
A mendicant's prayer, impenitent.

Dirty and torn to a rag,
My coat is the thing I am,
A thing for a decent man to damn.
My feet that lag
On the twisting tracks have burst
Through to the knife-keen air; and
thirst
Wrings and maddens the soul of me.

HARD LABOR

Free, I said, free!
From the eternal monotony of the old
time,
The feeble slaving for a fool's reward,
The cant of folk "for ever with the Lord,"
Whose solemn-folded hands are steeped
in slime.

Free too from those
Whose clinging lips suck out between
their kisses
The souls of men, who shower a thousand
woes
For every of their petty, doled out blisses,
And at the last
Laugh at the starveling from their arms
outcast.

So I felt as I drifted
Forth to the road, and I lifted
My voice in a measured song:

THE TRAMP'S TALE

“I heard in the dusty town
The call of the wanton June,
And straight over dale and down
I followed the breathless tune,
Till, past man’s farthest abode,
In a region of drought and dearth,
I sought, by a winding road,
The utmost ends of the earth.

“And soon, in the desert places
Beyond the horizon’s rim,
The eager, sorrowful faces
Of those I had loved grew dim.
But the sun and the careless breeze
For the old griefs offered amends,
And the olden melodies
I sang to the stars, my friends.

“Yet Night, as a magic cup
Commingled of wine and tears,
Hath memories treasured up
Of those our radiant years;

HARD LABOR

And, deep as the grave that lies
Between you and my defeat,
The mystery of your eyes
I have not forgotten, sweet."

Truly a notable song, and quite sincere
As far as it went;
Only they made the truth appear
Awkward and different.
A charming tale of a girl is the one they
tell,
Of a babe new-born,
Left lonely to face the hell
Of the world's scorn.

Free, I said, free!
And fate comes behind and scourges me,
Till I fling scarred hands to the sky, and
curse
The God that made me a something worse
Than His meanest brutes, and for all my
pains

THE TRAMP'S TALE

Loads and galls me with thoughts for
chains,

Black thoughts I am doomed for ever to
think —

Ah . . . give me drink.



THE POET FROM HIS GARRET

ARROGANTLY,
Above the dazzling, city, darkness-zoned,
I look down on the fools that scoff at me,
As one enthroned.

Sadly the street
Its never-ending monotone uplifts.
Across the silent heavens, fearing-fleet,
The pale moon drifts.

Long, long ago
A maiden watched from every storied
tower,
And to the meanest churl that sighed
below
Might cast a flower.

HARD LABOR

Canst thou not see
My deep-red rose that lies beneath the
lamp?
Nay, o'er the luckless petals, wantonly
A thousand tramp.

DESPAIR IN LONDON

It was but yesterday that London seemed
The gateway to a kingdom of romance,
Upbuilt with mansions where no harm
might chance
The wanderer, of whose vast halls I
dreamed
Myself a conqueror. I little deemed
That in the happiness of thy bright
glance
Lay all my triumph, all the radiance
That on my pilgrimage a moment
gleamed.
To-day is sorrow's, and the dull streets
moan
In sombre answer to my stifled cry.
But hearing not, the stranger-souls
throng by,

HARD LABOR

Each with his separate burden, forward
faced
To some dim goal, whence with relentless
haste
Again to-morrow he shall pass, unknown.

Six barren years of shame, and at the
last

An ecstacy beyond my power to sing
Of love supernal, re-awakening

Within my soul dim creeds long since out-
cast.

What matter? They are vanished, over-
past,

The raptured moments of our golden
spring,

And twicefold grief is ours, remember-
ing

Their fulness through the dreary winter-
fast.

O laughter-laden Muse, I weave no
more

DESPAIR IN LONDON

Gay crowns of hyacinth for thy fair head,

The madrigal is still, to darkness sped
The lawless torch of fantasy, whose light,
Flaunted so lately in the face of Night,

No ministry of labor may restore.

O sov'ran city, 'neath whose ancient sway
Gigantic empire-forces strive and strain,

Hear'st thou, amid the tumult of thy pain,

The piping dirge-note of the tune I play.

Ah no, the harsh, inexorable gray
Of tower and tenement I search in vain,
No laurel-garland weave I, but a chain
Whose galling links shall fetter me for aye.

So that unshaken trust on which I lean,

And all our memories, shall be as nought.

HARD LABOR

No cross shall mark the battle that we
fought,
No song commemorate the hours of gold,
Only the sluggish river shall enfold
Once more to its embrace a thing
obscene.

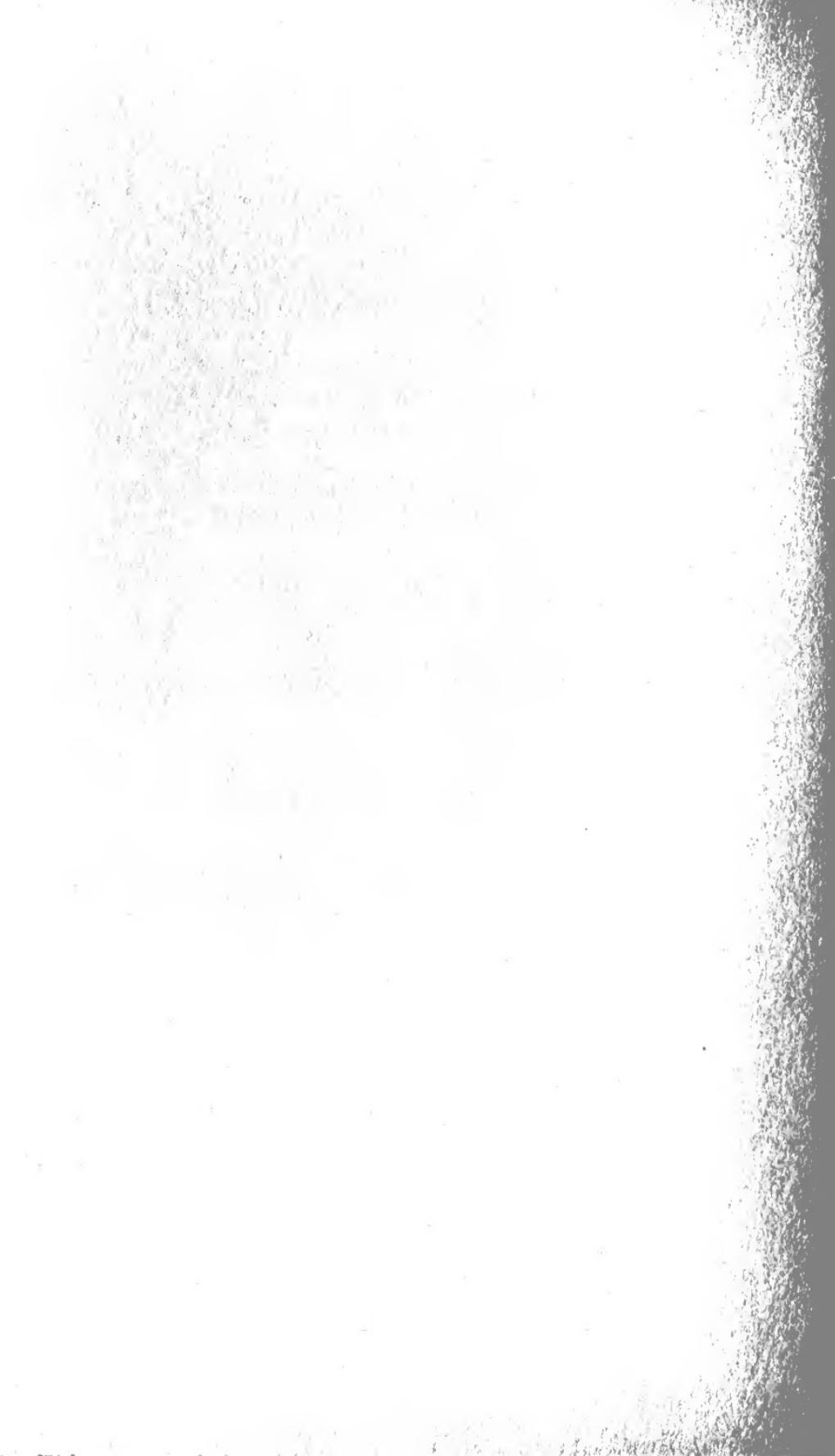
NEW YORK NIGHT

A SUMMER day grows old,
And a moment over the town
The towers are aflame with gold,
As the sun goes down.

Tired workers homeward throng
In an endless, hurrying stream,
And folly awakes ere long
To its hour supreme.

At last, from square and park,
Like a shadow, the silence creeps,
Café and saloon grow dark,
And the city sleeps.

So, when life's tumults cease,
May the noise of the restless fight
Be merged in the sacred peace
Of a summer night.



THE DEATH OF THE FIRSTBORN

“WEEP not, belovèd; for the all-wise God,
That takes this little life to Him
again,
Is yet all-kind; His weary feet have
trod
The road of pain.”

“He has not borne the burden of my grief,
Else would He not have robbed me of
my son.
How can I say of your almighty Thief
His will be done?”

“We may not question Him; our babe
that sleeps
Shall not the sorrows of the world
endure.

HARD LABOR

Nay, let us think Him merciful, who
keeps
The lips so pure.”

“But I could minister to his despair,
His deepest infamy I could atone.
There is no prison that I could not share
Save this alone.”

“Yet if, my sweet, another there shall be,
Whose greedy lips shall hang upon
your breast,
Will you not then in new-found joy
agree
God’s way is best?”

“There is no other that can take his place.
Peace there may be; but this shall
not depart;
Now and for ever is my baby’s face
Graved on my heart.”

BEYOND

Is it as that one said,
Who saw between our frank, desiring eyes
Veil upon veil beside our power to tear?
Are we then prisoners, who may not share
Our servitude, until the body lies
In its last bed?

Nay, even at the end
He said we should not know, but dream-
lessly
Wait for a nothingness, till, blotted out
From this wild book wherein we read
but doubt,
Our very memories shall cease to be,
And cease to blend.

Why does he speak of rest?
As those storm-driven ones whom Dante
hailed
Amid the depths, better it were to toss

HARD LABOR

Hither and thither, shouldering a cross,
Until our claspèd arms have flagged and
failed,
Your lips have pressed

Mine without agony,
And heart has called no more to answ'ring
heart.

Ah, we are slaves, entangled by a lure
Of fate, and bound together to endure
The eternal fool's-parade of life and art
Unchangingly.

I will not have it so,
There is no veil shall hide your soul from
mine.
From star to star, onward and upward
borne;
We shall but laugh death's menaces to
scorn,
Seeking at last what else may be divine,
Save that we know.

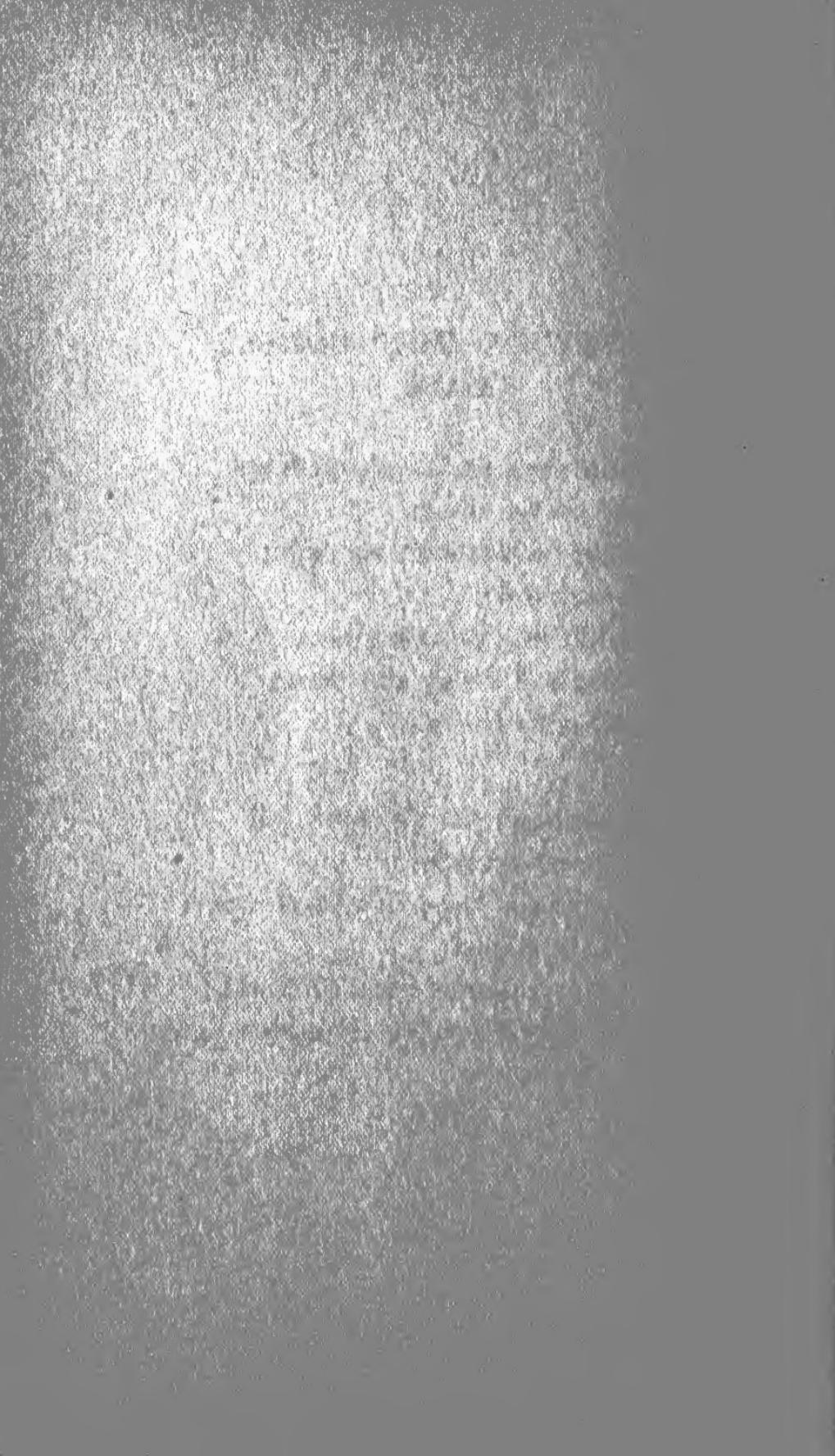
A SONG FOR YOUR BIRTHDAY

LIGHT words spring from thy lips,
As I listen and dream,
Like the rustle of fairy ships
On a fairy stream.

Proud looks flash from thine eyes,
So proud, my sweet,
The shadow of evil lies
Dead at thy feet.

Thy soul is a sheltered close,
In whose twilight deeps
Full many a wild wood-rose
Blossoms and sleeps.

Belovèd, through whom I guess
At a light divine,
Passionate, measureless,
Thy heart is mine.



SUNSET ON THE DORSET COAST

A FINE rain drips on the sluggish sea
And the barren down,
The mist enshrouds with its panoply
The dreary town,
And far aloft in a settled gloom,
Vast sentinels of decay and doom,
The dull cliffs frown.

In a cold embrace the shadows fall
On the ocean's breast,
Bitter the pain of the gull's harsh call
Winged to its nest.
But ere the tyrannous hand of Night
Can grasp Day's sceptre, a sudden light
Startles the west.

HARD LABOR

The storm-clouds quiver and gleam and
flare,
As the dying sun
With gold and crimson, radiant-rare,
Tints one by one;
And clear to the ocean's farthest line,
A web of fire as gossamer fine
The Master has spun.

Slowly the splendor wanes and dies,
While the dark cliffs stand
As naked truth a mirage of lies
Born to command;
Till the moon in elfin ecstasy
Tips with a glamor of faery
The desolate strand.

BELIEF

THERE is a God above the tenement
Who knows its misery, but gives no
sign;
A holy Spirit, puissant, divine,
Yet is the sword sheathed and the gold
unspent.

I, that would be with little gods content,
I, that have worshipped at a mortal
shrine,
Under such weight of mystery am bent,
Nor may belief nor faith in Him be
mine.

O friend, it is not granted me to trust
In One all-powerful, but this I know:
Our souls that 'mid this sea of life and lust
Are derelicts the winds toss to and fro,
Beyond the confines of the charted seas
In a fair anchorage might ride at ease.

FREEDOM

I

I WILL go back to those for whom I cried,
Outcasts and thieves and slayers of
their kind,

I will go back with a contented mind,
For there, in bondage, may rich truth
abide.

There, at the least, is hate not deified,
And those I welcomed as my friends
were free

Of that inexpiable infamy
By whose dread weight o'erburdened,
Ferrer died.

No need have I of joy, no fear of pain,
There, in the stillness, none may chain
my thought.

HARD LABOR

Your trivial liberty, so dearly bought,
Freely and gladly I give back again.
I pray you, comrades, open wide your
gate,
Nay, pity not, I was with you of late.

FREEDOM

II

INTO the gray world whither I return

Few wander who may voice its mystery.

One jester-priest there was, who curiously

Strove the calm face of Sorrow to discern,

Dropping her tears upon the gruesome urn.

He knew, who sang of Reading, all that lies

Behind the watchful penetrative eyes
Of these my friends, save that he could not learn;

For, as bare hillsides through an evening mist

Are robed in dreams, so that firm-bolted grate,

Through which he could but gaze disconsolate,



HARD LABOR

Seems but a lattice where Delight keeps
tryst,
And they whose sins ye think beyond all
cure
To me are holy, in that they endure.

FREEDOM

III

Ah no, I may not seek, belovèd, there
My haven; lest thine arms around me
twine
No longer, and thy lips, that breathe
on mine
Triumphantly, pale to a swift despair.
The cross that I have given thee to bear
Presses too hard, it must not crush
thee, sweet,
And this last hour of sorrowful defeat
Must be forgotten in the joys we share.
So much is won, we may not lose the rest;
So much is known, we may not start
nor shrink;
If there be poison in the cup we drink
Together, surely is it not unblest,
And though to the great silence we depart
I shall be prisoner within thy heart.

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